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Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli, for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C/NF) Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema is emerging as the most prominent and dynamic member of the Prodi Government. Barely six months into his tenure at the MFA, he appears intent on leaving his imprint on Italian foreign policy, the Italian Government, and on Italy itself. On foreign policy, D'Alema wants Italy to be not only a key European power, but also a significant voice in global politics. He believes his vision for Italy is broader than the institution that provides the platform for his forays into global politics, and he frequently leaves his key advisors - and allies - scrambling to figure him out and to sort out the pieces. While D'Alema has high regard for his advisors, on key foreign policy decisions he does not feel constrained to abide by their recommendations or keep them in the loop. This style of decision-making will require that we lobby him directly on key issues, as the Secretary recently did effectively in Jordan. His domestic agenda appears even more complicated. As a former PM, D'Alema feels at least as qualified to lead as PM Prodi, and there is real rivalry between the two for the political limelight, with Prodi at the helm of government, but D'Alema the political keel. End Summary.

After the Election: Unfulfilled Ambitions?

¶2. (C/NF) Following the Center-Left election victory in April, initial speculation focused on whether D'Alema would become President of the Chamber of Deputies or President of the Republic, both positions which would have allowed him a strong voice in domestic policy. Internal political maneuvering prevented him from being selected for either of those positions, but D'Alema continues to believe that he is far more qualified to lead than many of his coalition partners. While he is an astute student of geopolitics, his energetic style of international diplomacy is often interpreted at home as an attempt to raise his own domestic political profile. The foreign minister's ambition and political acumen have, not surprisingly, triggered speculation that he is positioning himself for a return to the PM seat in the event the Prodi Government falters.

(Comment: We do not consider this a likely short-term scenario; see ref a. End comment.) D'Alema avoids playing second fiddle to the PM; he had to be cajoled into attending the NATO Riga Summit. He reportedly felt there was little role for him at Riga, with both PM and MinDef there as well, but some contacts say he also did not want to be upstaged by Prodi. When Prodi went to China recently at the head of a big business delegation, D'Alema went just a few weeks later on a separate MFA trip.

Big Fish, Small Tank

13. (C/NF) During the campaign Prodi and D'Alema promised to reverse a perceived slide in Italian influence in Europe and the world. Prodi and D'Alema believed that Italy had lost influence both on the world stage and in Europe, partially through what they considered the Berlusconi government's uncritically close association with the U.S. and partially through Italian lethargy. Initially, they declared Italy would pursue a foreign policy in line with the views of traditional European allies, putting a greater focus on the European Union, the United Nations and other multilateral organizations. Prodi, a former EU Commission President envisioned a foreign policy aimed at achieving broad consensus within the 25 member nations. But it soon became apparent that D'Alema wanted Italy to be one of the first among equals in the organization. Italy's hosting of the Rome Lebanon conference in July and its pledge to be the largest troop contributor in UNIFIL was an example of D'Alema's desire to shine on the global stage. After the conference, he focused heavily on Italy's role in the Middle East and maintained that UNIFIL could serve as a model for a mission in Gaza. He hopes the Lebanon Conference momentum and Italy's leadership within UNIFIL will secure Italy a more

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prominent voice in Middle East Peace Process discussions.

14. (C/NF) Since the Rome Lebanon Conference D'Alema's efforts to show leadership sometimes propel his foreign policy, self-described as "idealism tempered by pragmatism," beyond the ability of his ministry to respond. Since taking the post of FM, post has witnessed first-hand a series of major, high-profile foreign policy initiatives that D'Alema either did not coordinate with his key advisors or that were not developed within his ministry. In September, the USG appealed to the MFA to vote against Venezuela's bid to become a member of the UNSC. MFA officials, including DG for Political Affairs Terzi, told us they agreed and vowed to use their influence to prevent this from happening. But D'Alema, on the day of the vote, took his aides by surprise, announcing Italy would abstain. In October, MFA officials floated the idea of restarting EU SAA talks with Belgrade in advance of parliamentary elections in Serbia but insisted that Italy would not push until after the matter had been discussed by the Contact Group on October 21 in Vienna. But then D'Alema took the matter to the EU 25 during the October 16-17 GAERC. French and German poloffs later confirmed that both Paris and Berlin were caught flat-footed and feared that such a move risked damaging the credibility of the ICTY. D'Alema took his MFA colleagues by surprise again when, citing the Rome Lebanon conference as his model, he launched a campaign proposing a comprehensive high-level conference on Afghanistan to take place in Rome in February (ref b). Without consulting with the U.S. or other NATO partners, and shortly before the Riga Summit (which was to focus heavily on Afghanistan), D'Alema told the press that such a conference was needed to coordinate reconstruction and security efforts, and engage regional players. D'Alema continues to press on despite opposition - including from Afghan president Karzai.

Looking forward toward Iran

15. (C/NF) Given our experience working with D'Alema, we expect to see him fully engaged on the Iran issue, particularly after January when Italy takes a seat on the UN Security Council. Additionally, he will continue to push for a seat for Italy at the EU3 table. He has given us every indication that he agrees with the process and the message the international community is sending to Tehran and is likely to be with us in the initial stages - including international condemnation Iran's refusal to suspend enrichment, travel restrictions and some sanctions. However, given Italy's large economic interests in Iran coupled with Italy's tilt toward engagement on international crises, D'Alema is likely to work to ensure that the situation never reaches a point where large-scale sanctions need to be imposed. . D'Alema has told us that absent clear international legal obligations to do so, it will be difficult for Italy to take unilateral steps to exert financial pressure on Iran. D'Alema believes that a resolution rests in the hands of the US, not the EU. He will continue to push Iran to meet the concerns of the international community, but at the same time he may try to push the US to engage Iran on regional issues in exchange. This might mean that D'Alema will try to include Iran in a Contact Group for Afghanistan and to support engagement with Iran on the future of Iraq. We can use Italy's UNSC seat to give him a sense of inclusion in the process but must make clear to him that inclusion requires quiet, advanced coordination - no freelancing with the press on Iran nuclear/sanctions issues.

Comment

16. (C/NF) D'Alema has been an energetic traveler. He has put priority focus on the Middle East, judging it to be an important factor for the security of both Italy and Europe as a whole. His working style is pragmatic, and generally effective. He wants to have an impact; we have even noted in recent months a distinct improvement in D'Alema's spoken English. But the Italian foreign minister is first and foremost a politician; in fact, he is probably the most influential politician in the Center-Left governing alignment. So, when he commits, you can generally take it to the bank. At the same time, while D'Alema has high regard for his advisors, on key foreign policy decisions he does not feel constrained to abide by their recommendations or even keep them in the loop. This makes for uncertainty belowdecks

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at times. And from our perspective, it is a style of decision-making and leadership that will benefit from periodic, direct, high-level engagement, as the Secretary recently did in Jordan - though sometimes even that won't do.

End Comment.

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